

TESTIMONY OF THE MONTANA CHAPTER OF THE SIERRA CLUB

**House Joint Resolution 31** by Representative George Everett

**"A joint resolution opposing the Rockies Prosperity Act"**

House Natural Resources Committee – February 14, 2007

Mr. Chairman, members of the House Natural Resources Committee, for the record my name is Bob Clark and I submit the following information and testimony on behalf of the Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club in opposition to House Joint Resolution 31.

What is the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act? A Bill to designate wilderness (20,572,147 acres (Montana – 6.3 million acres)), wild and scenic rivers (1,810 miles), national park and preserve study areas (1.7 million acres), wildland recovery areas (1,022,769 acres), and biological connecting corridors (3,476,118 acres) on certain public lands in the States of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming. The goal of the Bill is protection of an entire, functioning ecosystem. These designations are based on the best science on ecological and watershed features—not arbitrary political boundaries.

The Sierra Club is a strong supporter of the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA) in the U.S. Congress. This visionary legislation attempts to preserve the last blank spots on the map - the remaining roadless areas on our national forest. We feel that the public strongly supports NREPA. In 1999 & 2000, during the Forest service comment period for the National Roadless Area Conservation Rule, nearly 1.5 million people sent comments to the agency. An analysis of those comments determined that 95% of Americans and 78% of Montanans asked the agency to protect these last wild areas from new roads.

In protecting roadless areas, logging activities would not be effected because the Forest Service is currently prohibited from entering these areas (Roadless Area Conservation Rule). Logging or Roadbuilding has not occurred in these areas for years.

This Legislation creates 2300 good new jobs in wildland restoration. Heavy equipment operators, laborers, truck drivers, etc. - under the Davis-Bacon Act (prevailing wage) helping rural communities with needed jobs.

Biological Connecting Corridors are wildland areas located between the major ecosystems of the region and are essential for wildlife and plant migration and genetic interchange. These areas are some of the most beautiful productive mountain ranges in the Nation. Large wild areas such as the Bridger and Sapphire Mountains are examples of these areas. The inventoried roadless areas over 5,000 acres in size would be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System. Already developed lands within these areas would be subject to restricted management activities such as no clear-cutting or new roads, with an emphasis on reducing overall road densities.

NREPA does not affect grazing (grazing is allowed in wilderness areas)

NREPA does not affect private lands and pertains to public land only.

NREPA respects and honors the rights and religious practices of our first citizens. The Badger-Two Medicine area adjacent to Glacier National Park is designated The Blackfeet Wilderness where traditional Native American uses and treaty rights are fully protected. All areas designated through NREPA explicitly recognize and protect these rights

Sec. 703 of the Bill states; "Nothing in this Act may be construed to affect or modify any treaty or other right of and Indian tribe."

NREPA protects existing water rights;

Se. 701 of the Bill states; " Nothing in this Bill may be construed as a relinquishment or reduction of any water rights reserved, appropriated, or otherwise secured by the United States in the State of Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, or Wyoming on or before the date of the enactment of this Act."

#### Key Points Addressed by NREPA

- Uses sound science to protect and restore endangered wildlife,
- Uses sound economics to promote sustainable economic development in the Northern Rockies region,
- Creates thousands of good paying jobs restoring damaged habitats,
- Pays for job creation by ending taxpayer-supported corporate timber subsidies,
- Does not close access to public lands,
- Allows for historic uses such as hunting, fishing and firewood gathering,
- Affects only Federal public lands—private landowners are not impacted,
- Respects and honors Native American religions and treaty rights,
- Protects watershed health—water supply and quality are issues of central importance in the semiarid interior mountains, the Great Plains, and the densely populated Northwest,
- Protects lands virtually unchanged since Lewis and Clark saw them.

#### Economic Benefits of NREPA

NREPA makes solid economic as well as environmental sense. Millions of taxpayer dollars are spent each year subsidizing the logging of our national forests in the Northern Rockies. People live and work in Montana because of its natural beauty. The economic vitality of the State is dependent on the high quality natural environment. Further damage to these pristine areas threatens the economic base of the region. Protecting these lands will create more jobs than if they are degraded.

- NREPA provides a net savings to tax-payers of more than \$245 million over the first ten years after passage by prohibiting below-cost road building and timber sale programs within sensitive roadless areas.
- NREPA won't "lock up" public lands. Approximately 50% of publicly managed lands in the region will be managed for sustainable uses.
- NREPA protects the economic base of the region: clean water, wildlife, fish, recreation, jobs and the unsurpassed natural beauty.
- NREPA creates more than 2,300 jobs restoring damaged lands and watersheds—good wage jobs that restore wildlife and fish habitat and add to economic growth.
- NREPA is based on sound science, sustainable economic models and environmental law that will provide long-term stability that is vital to intelligent economic planning and prosperity.

Given the above information, we feel that this Resolution does not represent the best interests of Montanans and we urge the Committee to vote no on HJ 31.

Sincerely,

Bob Clark

Montana Chapter of the Sierra Club